



The Parish of Saints Philip and James  
1 Carow Place, St. James, NY 11780

631-584-5454

# October 27th, 2024

## Thirtieth Sunday In Ordinary Time



“Jesus said to him in reply,

“What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see.”

Jesus told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.”

“With Philip & James we pray to live lives worthy of the call to be  
Apostles of Hope”

Daily Mass: 7:30am and 9:15 am  
Saturday 5pm Sunday: 8am 10 am 12noon

## STS. PHILIP & JAMES PASTORAL STAFF

Parish Center Phone: 631-584-5454 Parish Fax: 631-862-9675

Website—www.sspj.org

### PARISH CENTER OFFICE HOURS

Open Monday, Tuesday Wednesday 9am-6pm

Open Thursday 9am-6pm

Closed Friday, Saturday and Sunday

### CLERGY

Father Sean Magaldi, Pastor

Father Joe Lobo-Associate Pastor

Father Dennis Gannon-Associate Pastor

Deacon John Keenan

### PASTORAL ASSOCIATE

Sister Theresita Donach, CSFN

### BUSINESS MANAGER

Virginia Portanova

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: 631-584-3204

### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR Grades 1-3

Charlotte Czujko~cczujko@sspj.org

### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR Grades 4-6

Barbara Luna~bluna@sspj.org

### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR Grades 7-8

Dominick Avento~davento@sspj.org

### MUSIC DIRECTOR

Margaret Adams

### COORDINATOR OF PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY

Lynn Sisti

### DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Sandra Rago

### DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES

John Cordes

### SSPJ SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Diane M. Anderson

School Phone-631-584-7896 School Fax: 631-584-3258

### TRUSTEES

Brendan McGovern ~ Tina Cafaro

### PASTORAL COUNCIL

Michael Sharkey, Lou Guerra, Cynthia Lombardi, Paul Damato

Lisa Keane, Maureen Burke, Nancy Sanders, Peter Suski, Sheila Cavooris

### LIVE-STREAMING THE 8:00AM SUNDAY MASS

The Sunday at 8:am is available to view on our SSPJ Church Facebook page, while it is live at the 8am mass, it can be recalled at any time.

### Thanking you for your generosity

Financial Support Needed weekly to meet Parish budget:

**\$16,700**

Weekly Collection: Sunday, October 20th, 2024:

Collections from Weekend masses: \$10,411.

Mail Collections: \$905.

Faith Direct(126Participants)\_WEEKLY \$3,374.04

**Total Collection: \$ 14,690.04**

**Collection for Missions: \$2,779.**

FAITH DIRECT: VISIT SSPJ.ORG CLICK ON FAITH DIRECT ICON:USING

### Sacraments

**Baptism**— Celebrated twice per month. Parents are asked to register at the Pastoral Center for Pre-Baptism Program.

**Marriage**—Couples are asked to contact the Pastoral Center before visiting the reception hall. The Marriage Preparation process is nine months before your proposed wedding date.

**Confirmation**—Seventh and Eighth grade students are prepared to celebrate through Religious Ed or SSPJ School. Adults prepare through RCIA.

**Reconciliation**— Available Saturdays from 4:00pm-5:00pm in the Church or by contacting the Parish Center for an appointment.

**Anointing of the Sick**— In case of serious, unexpected illness, please contact the Parish Center office to arrange for a Priest to pray with the person who is ill. Anointing of the Sick is held on the first Sunday of the month following the 8:00am mass please see the Sacristan before mass.

**R.C.I.A.**— Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (non-Catholic adults desiring to become Catholic) are asked to contact the Parish Center Office.

**Eucharistic Adoration In The Church**— Monday 1:30pm -7pm

### PLEASE REMEMBER THOSE WHO SERVE FOR US IN YOUR PRAYERS



LCDR. MEGAN M. SHUTKA-VIK, USN  
CAPT. WILSON MARKS- USN  
CAPT. MICHAEL T. DOLAN- JR. -D.O, US ARMY  
LT. COL. JOHN KAIREAS  
SPC. NICOLE A. CANNON  
SGM. MICHAEL P. BORRELLI-US ARMY  
CAPT. JOHN TULLY- USN  
LT. COL. JAMES TULLY-US ARMY  
JOSEPH SAGGIO- USNC  
CAPTAIN PAUL WILLMS  
STAFF SGT. MICHAEL LONGHENRY  
LT. COL. PAUL T. JACKSON-  
STAFF SGT ALEXANDER PARRELLA-USAF  
RICHARD SOTOMAYER- USAF  
SGT. CONNOR F. SCOTT- USMC  
SGT. CORY O'HARA -USMC  
PFC. CHARLES CHRISTOPHER HOWELL  
STEVEN CAVA-USN  
ERIC SEELIN- USMC  
CW2 CHRIS MUNZ  
CW2 NATASHA WORTMAN  
CORPORAL JAMES T. CASEY-USMC  
SGT. JOSHUA MAHONEY- US ARMY  
KEVIN JONES-USCG  
PRIVATE JOSHUA OLSEN-USARNG  
GLEN CRIMA-US ARMY  
MARIO CATANIA-USMC  
RYAN ANTHONY NASCIMENTO-USMC  
KYLE ANTHONY NASCIMENTO-US ARMY  
ENS. RYAN M. SHOWS -USN  
STAFF SGT. RYAN REXRODE-USMC  
DR. KARA VANDEKIEFT, COL.-USAF  
SGT. STEPHEN D. OUTCAULT-USMC  
PAUL MUMOLO-USN  
VICTORIA ZEMAN, USCG  
KYLE J. GRUNER -US ARMY  
MARK GIORDANO—US COASTGUARD  
KELLI MCLAUGHLIN—LT. US ARMY NATL.GUARD  
1 LT MICHAEL J BANG—MILITARY INTELLIGENCE US ARMY  
MATTHEW PATRICK GALLAGHER US ARMY  
LT. COMMANDER CHRISTOPHER SHANK MD  
MIDN ERIN NICASTRO, USNA  
MLDN KATE NICASTRO, USNA  
MAJ. BRENDAN JOHNSTON-USAF  
CHRISTOPHER A. HIONIDIS-USAF  
MICHAEL HIONIDIS, USM  
EMMETT MOLONEY—USN  
HANK MOLONEY—USAF  
CARL JOSEPHSON-USAF  
DANIEL JOSEPHSON-USAF  
SAMANTHA JOSEPHSON-USAF  
RICHARD WULFORST, III USA ANG  
JAMES A KOESTER, USA 2ND LT  
CONNOR TOOMEY, USM LT.  
CPL LARISA DORRIAN USMC

## Father Sean's Letter

*My Dear Friends in Jesus Christ and Our Blessed Mother,*

*As many of you know, I am a big Mets fan. As a result, their loss to the Dodgers was disappointing. People say that it's just a game, and it is, but there is something more to it. I remember attending games as a kid and watching games with my family. I once camped outside of Shea Stadium with my mom to get tickets. When they clinched the Pennant in 2015, I went to Modell's right after the game with my mom to get World Series gear. Finally, one of my latest memories is bringing my nephew to his first game and seeing how excited he was (I've written about this before).*

*This season, the Mets recently created a lot of great memories, but eventually, it came to a disappointing end. I couldn't help but think about the temptation to hold on to the good times. In our lives, we have seasons of highs and lows. We can sometimes lament the loss of the high moments during the low moments. It reminds me of the Transfiguration. As Jesus appears in His glorified body, Peter asks if he should build tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. One of the reasons Jesus shows the Apostles His glorified body is to help remove the scandal of the Cross and to point toward the Resurrection.*

*Remember, we aren't meant for this world forever. The good things in this life help point us to Heaven's glory, but in this life, they're temporary. We, like Jesus, have to carry our Cross as well. In those moments of pain and difficulty, we want to remember the moments of joy and difficulty to remind us that the pain of this life is temporary and doesn't compare to the glory of Heaven.*

*In Christ,*

*Fr. Sean*

SUPPORT THE SSPJ  
  
Christmas Tree Sale  
PRE-SALE FUNDRAISER

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QR CODE TO  
LEARN WAYS  
YOU CAN GIVE



SHARE WITH  
FRIENDS AND  
FAMILY AND LOCAL  
BUSINESSES

OCTOBER 28TH-NOVEMBER 29TH

# Mass Intentions, For the week of October 27th, 2024



**Eucharistic Adoration  
Is held  
Monday's in the Church  
From 1:30pm -7:00pm**

*Lord, I will love You with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my might! I give everything that I am to You because without You I am nothing. I love You God because You hear my voice and my supplications. You are my Father, my Best Friend and Comforter; I can always turn to You because I know that You will always be faithful to me.*

*Deuteronomy 6:5 & Psalm 116:1*

*We Pray for those who are ill...*

*All powerful God and ever living God, the lasting health of all who believe in your, hear us as we ask your loving help for the sick, restore their health, that they may again offer joyful thanks in your church.  
Amen*

*Please contact the Office of Parish Social ministry , 631-584-5454, to include the name of a brother or sister in need of prayer*

*Alan Piscak, Ann Marie*

*Amanda Rose Critella, Amanda Cacoperdo*

*Benito Fernandez, Brenden Toomey*

*Carmela Montesano, Donna Fabrizio*

*David Beleck*

*Ed Ceraso, Edward Luna, Jessie Lokai*

*Kathleen Martin, Kerry*

*Larry Baldwin, Mia Mednick*

*Patrice Henry, Peter Portanova*

*Rose Bruno, Rob Remhild*

*Ronnie Reichert, Raymond Grayson*

*Stephanie Seban, Tina Cafaro*

*Tonia Perdue, Joan Cooper*

*Tim Tippett, Baby Luca,*

*Madeline Kelley*

<i>Saturday October 26th Cantor: Feeney</i>	<i>Father Maurizio Lector: O'Connor/Students EM: Byrne/Drechsler/ Taurasssi/Toto/Anderson</i>	<i>9:15am  5:00pm</i>	<i>Brian Rapczynski  Jack Steele</i>
<i>Sunday October 27th Cantor: Hill</i>	<i>Father Joe Lector: Cullen/Carey EM: Dervan/Koke/Portanova/ Sehne/Sica</i>	<i>8:00am</i>	<i>For the People of SSPJ Parish</i>
<i>Cantor Lohmann</i>	<i>Father Gannon Lector: Koke/O'Leary EM: Napolitano/Conti/ Parish/Clarke/Keane/ McKie</i>	<i>10:00am</i>	<i>Geraldine Szymanski</i>
<i>Cantor: Lupinacci</i>	<i><u>Collective Mass</u> Father Lector: Geier/Just EM: Consenz/Margaret/ Settinieri/Chilton</i>	<i>12:00pm</i>	<i>Thomas Barry Ursula Gordon Mary Hughes Madeline Bleggi Donna DiIorio Joan Martin</i>
<i>Monday October 28th Sts Simon &amp; Jude</i>	<i>Adoration 1:30-7pm In the Church</i>	<i>7:30am  9:15am</i>	<i>Living~Michele&amp;Michael Maldony Jacqueline Harvey</i>
<i>Tuesday October 29th</i>		<i>7:30am  9:15am</i>	<i>John Blazich  Jack Duffy</i>
<i>Wednesday October 30th</i>		<i>7:30am  9:15am</i>	<i>Jeffrey Indelicato  Dorothy &amp; Louis Graziano</i>
<i>Thursday October 31st</i>		<i>7:30am  9:15am 5:00pm</i>	<i>John Reese <u>Collective Mass</u> James Coffrey Luigi Volpe</i>
<i>Friday November 1st</i>	<i>All Saints</i>	<i>7:30am  9:15am</i>	<i>Living~Father Douglas Arcoleo Gregoria Diaz&amp;Evelyn Eustace</i>
<i>Saturday November 2nd Cantor:</i>	<i>Father Maurizio Lector: Dreschler/Student EM: Duffy/Sisti/Anderson/ Ruggieri/Byrne All Souls Day</i>	<i>9:15am  5:00pm</i>	<i>Patrick Kelly  Madeline Haggerty</i>
<i>Sunday November 3rd Cantor:</i>	<i>Father Joe Lector: Dervan/Czujko EM: Kenney/Dervan/Diaz/ McGrath/LaSerra</i>	<i>8:00am</i>	<i>For the People of SSPJ Parish</i>
<i>Cantor:</i>	<i>Father Gannon Lector: Just/Franco EM: Rizzo/Calderone/ Consenz/Amen/Luna</i>	<i>10:00am</i>	<i>All Souls Novena</i>
<i>Cantor:</i>	<i><u>Collective Mass</u> Father All Priests Lector: Kenton/Carey EM: Napolitano/Conti/ Stack/Suski</i>	<i>12:00pm</i>	<i>Theodura Ryan John DeLorenzo Howard Alonzo Elizabeth Helen Walls Paul D'Amelio Salvatore Giordano</i>

All are cordially invited to the

# Mass of Installation

Of Reverend Sean Magaldi  
As Pastor of The Parish of  
Saints Philip and James

Sunday, October 27, 2024  
12 pm Mass

Reception to follow in the auditorium



## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

AT STS. PHILIP & JAMES SCHOOL



### Nursery Program

Our nursery program is designed for kids to learn, play, and grow together. The program encourages fun, socialization, reading readiness, prayer, and more!



### Pre-K Program

Our Pre-K program supports students ages 4 - 5 in all aspects of childhood development allowing them to learn and grow socially, academically and spiritually.



### Kindergarten

Our Kindergarten program focuses on educating the "whole child" by preparing children to be creative, self-confident learners as well as good citizens through a hands-on approach that is interwoven with religious values.



JOIN US FOR TO AM MASS FOLLOWED BY OPEN HOUSE  
ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27TH FROM 11 AM-12 PM

### Questions?

Call or visit our website for more information.  
We look forward to seeing you!



Contact Us  
(631) 584-7896



Visit Our Website  
[www.sspjschool.net](http://www.sspjschool.net)



Our Location  
359 Clinton Avenue  
St James, NY 11780

## Let's Raise Some Money!

# Clothing Drive

Sts Philip and James School & Parish  
is hosting a used clothing donation event!

**Date:** Saturday, November 9, 2024  
**Time:** 9:00AM - 2:00PM  
**Location:** Sts Philip and James School SIDE parking lot!

**Contact Person:** Call/Text Faye Saladino 646-573-9014

**We are collecting: wearable & usable clothing, shoes, belts, handbags, bedsheets, towels, stuffed animals, small hard toys and bikes**

We will receive money for every pound we collect.  
Please put all items that you are donating into tightly tied plastic bags

## SSPJ Faith Sharing Group



Join us on Wednesday mornings for prayer, discussion, and faith-sharing. We are a welcoming and open-hearted group whose purpose is to deepen faith and build community. Past meetings have involved discussion, book study, and videos, but we are always open to new ideas. We meet in the Bethany Center from 10:00 - 11:00. New and returning members are welcome! If you have any questions, please call the parish center office at 631-584-5454.

### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NEWS:

MASS FOR OUR  
COMMUNION I AND  
COMMUNION II  
FAMILIES

SUNDAY  
NOVEMBER 3RD, 2024  
AT

10:00am

PLEASE JOIN US AS WE  
SHARE MASS TOGETHER;  
AND THEN ENJOY SOME  
NICE HOSPITALITY  
RIGHT AFTER.

***All are invited  
to join us for the***

***All Souls' Day Mass of  
Remembrance***

***On Saturday,  
November 2, 2024  
At 12 Noon in the Church***

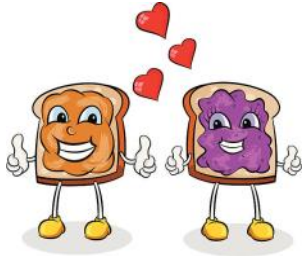
***As we pray for our beloved  
deceased.***

***At this Mass we will  
remember in a special way  
our loved ones who have  
died between  
September 1st, 2023  
and August 31st 2024***



# God Bless SSPJ Youth Ministry!!!

Thank you to all 43 kids who participated in Peanut Butter and Jelly Gang last Saturday. We were able to make 504 sandwiches, which were donated to Pax Christi, the Gerald Ryan Outreach Center, and Mercy Inn Soup Kitchen. Thank you for your generosity in donating bread, peanut butter, and jelly, and thank you to the Knights of Columbus for their financial support for paper goods. Stay tuned for information about our next Youth Group event on Saturday, November 16th



**Celebrating Jesus with Miss Charlotte's Communion I Class**  
Miss Charlotte always reminds us the  
**Jesus is our FRIEND AND OUR SAVIOR!!**



# Parish Social Ministry

*We remember,*

**Richard G. Dietrich  
Lucy Aprea**



*Safely home in the arms of Jesus*

The good news is that everyone can affect the environment positively with a bit of conscious effort. Reducing your carbon footprints and food miles are the first steps. When everyone makes a conscious effort to reduce personal waste and think about the impact that their every action has on the world around them, a change is within reach.



## Our Food Pantry Needs:

Thank you for your kindness and generosity  
**AT THIS TIME WE ARE  
FULLY STOCKED**



*The next meeting of the Seniors will be on  
October 28<sup>th</sup> from 1:30-3:30 in the St. Philip & James  
Room.  
Please join us for an afternoon of faith, friendship,  
and fun.*

## THE WORD DWELLS IN CREATION

The life of Francis shows us that right relationship in creation is not easy.

He heard the words spoken by the crucified Christ—"go rebuild my house"—

and took them literally. He began to rebuild San Damiano stone by stone.

But as he reflected on these words, he came to understand a deeper meaning

of them in his life. His devotion to Mary, the mother of God, led him to realize

that the "house of God" is, first, the human person. The Word dwells in human flesh,

not in stone buildings.

As the Word dwells in the human person, so, too, the same Word dwells in creation.

The word who is made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ is the same word

through whom all things are made. The Incarnation of God opened up the eyes of Francis

to the inner truth of creation as the very place where God is revealed—or concealed—

when humans fail to see God humbly present in the magnificent diversity of creation.

## THE RESPECT LIFE COMMITTEE...

*On behalf of all the babies, moms, and their families we would like to thank everyone who was able to participate in our Baby Shower and raffle this past weekend. We had the most successful fund raiser ever.*

*Your generosity will bring love and joy to so many.*

*Congratulations to the winners of our raffle:  
Roxann Palermo won the Spode Christmas China,  
Sheila Ferguson won the baby basket and  
the Nutcracker.*

*Our committee offers thanks to God and prayers  
for Fr. Sean as he is installed as our new  
Pastor this weekend*



## Katie's Way

Collecting new and gently used baby items and delivering them to the Life Center of Long Island.

These items benefit mothers, children, and expectant mothers in need. Your donations build a community that supports mothers who choose life for their unborn children under difficult circumstances. Suggested donation items: Diapers, wipes, bottles. Gently used baby and toddler items such as car seats, high chairs, strollers, clothing, toys, etc. New baby and toddler items, including diapers, wipes, formula, baby food, clothing, etc.

**PLEASE DROP OFF AT: 56 TILLOTSON AVENUE,  
ST. JAMES, NY**



## ***Sister T's Reflection***

***Dear Friends,***

***Autumn is a wonderful yet time paradox. Although the leaves are dying, they are also alive with color. The color makes the countryside vibrant! God is the true Artist, and I love his work.***

***Speaking of being alive, St. Irenaeus once declared that "the glory of God is a person fully alive!" Are you fully ALIVE? And just what does that mean. For each of us the answer would surely be different. I must truly say that I found many people this week that are 'fully alive'. I was excited to see the passion they had to deepen their relationship with God. Each one of them was traveling their own journey accompanied by those who are supportive of them, and each had a different story. At times their reflections surpassed mine. What an inspiration they were to me. Passionate about their faith and developing their relationship with God so that they could be fully alive.***

***It made me wonder, am I fully alive? Do I greet each day with passion and an eagerness to continue to build up God's Kingdom in my small part of the world? Or am I satisfied with being just comfortable where I am, with what I am doing? As Catholic Christians we are challenged to strive to live gracefully developing and sharing our gifts and talents given to us by God. I need to continue to bring forth and share my gifts and talents with my community, family and even myself. Do you feel and act 'fully alive'? If not, then why? Can you name the obstacles? Do you choose to live a life 'fully alive'?***

***Blessings and may you find yourself 'fully alive this week!'***

***Till next week, Sister T***

### **Music Ministry**

**Happy Halloween!!**

**A fun day for all and the eve of All Saints Day.**

This week on Friday is All Saints Day, November 1<sup>st</sup> followed by November 2, Saturday, All Soul's Day. We honor our popular saints and our family and friend's saints. We celebrate eternal life for those who have died.

Some of the November 1 songs will be, Sing with All the Saints and Prayer of St. Francis. These songs tell the glory of our Saints and their quest for everlasting peace.

All Soul's Day we honor our loved ones who have passed away and are our own personal Saints in heaven. Pray for them as we sing. They are with us always.

**Sing loud and strong to all our Saints.**

**Our Family Prayer Intention~ November 2024**  
Your prayers will be offered to Jesus during all masses this month.  
Look for them beside the Tabernacle  
Please offer your intention at mass next weekend;  
November 2nd & November 3rd, 2024  
We as a Parish Family will be holding you in our prayers

FAMILY/STUDENT NAMES	STUDENT GRADE LEVEL/SSPJ SCHOOL

*Dear Jesus,*

*We thank you for all the blessings we have received by your grace and love. We pray that you will continually remind us that we are never alone, and that you are always by our side.*

*Jesus, we offer you our hearts, our needs, our intentions, knowing that you hear us. Let your will be done.*

*Amen*

Who do you know that might need some special love, some kindness, or a smile to cheer them?  
Together as a family we offer them in our prayers....



The SSPJ buddy program is a wonderful opportunity for our Academy students to help guide the littles!



SSPJ nursery school students love their fifth and sixth grade buddies!

## *SSPJ's 8th Annual Trunk or Treat was a big success!*

*Thank you to all the families who decorated their trunks and to all who came out to support this event.*



## *Trunk or Treat!*

## 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 3, 2024: Dt 6:2-6 | Ps 18:2-4,47,51 |  
Heb 7:23-28 | Mk 12:28b-34

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus asserted the two greatest commands of the Law, quoting from the ancient Hebrew scriptures, which we have in the first reading. And the second reading, from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, explains how the Law of Love supersedes or fulfills all other laws. Jesus, who loved perfectly and never sinned against anyone, sacrificed himself for sinners. Therefore, we who want to follow him to heaven need to follow in his footsteps of love, by loving God and everyone else wholeheartedly.

Try as we might, though, we love imperfectly; we sin. The best penance, then, is an act of love, especially if it's a sacrifice offered to (or for) those who were harmed by our sin. But the damage we've caused has a ripple effect that goes far beyond anything we can see. This is remedied in the Catholic Church's Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus – through the priest – accepts our remorse and absolves our sins, while the entire earthly Body of Christ (the Church) – through the priest – accepts our penances for the earthly damage that our sins have caused.

Penance is not only an act of love, it's designed to strengthen our resolve to choose love when tempted to sin again. If the priest gives us an easy penance (for example, "Say the Lord's Prayer and



three Hail Marys"), if we really want to become holier, we should ask God during those three Hail Marys for a penance that's a more difficult act of love. We should choose a sacrifice, something that requires loving God with our whole heart, soul, and mind as well as loving ourselves and our neighbors just as much.

Saint Anthony Mary Claret said, "The love of Christ arouses us, urges us to run, and to fly, lifted on the wings of holy zeal." How high is your love flying? Zeal is a good measuring instrument of how much we love God.

### Reflect & Discuss:

- † Whom have you loved imperfectly this week?
- † What act of penance could you do that would be an exercise in loving them better, treating them the way Jesus would? When will you complete the reconciliation through the sacraments of the Church?
- † What does "zeal" mean? Name some of the ways that we love God with zeal.
- † Tell the story of a time when you made a sacrifice because of love. How did this reveal Jesus to others?

# A DOUBLE PRIMORDIAL BRANDING WITHIN

RON ROHLHEISER, OMI

From Pierre Teilhard de Chardin we get these words: *“Because, my God, though I lack the soul-zeal and the sublime integrity of your saints, I yet have received from you an overwhelming sympathy for all that stirs within the dark mass of matter; because I know myself to be irremediably less a child of heaven and a son of earth.”*

These words, like the words that open St. Augustine’s famous *Confessions*, not only describe a lifelong tension inside its author; they also name the foundational pieces for an entire spirituality. For everyone who is emotionally healthy and honest, there will be a lifelong tension between the attractions of this world and the lure of God. The earth, with its beauties, its pleasures, and its physicality can take our breath away and have us believe that this world is all there is and all that needs to be. Who needs anything further? Isn’t life here on earth enough? Besides, what proof is there for any reality and meaning beyond our lives here?

But even as we are so powerfully, and rightly, drawn to the world and what it offers, another part of us finds itself caught in the embrace and the grip of another reality, the divine, which though more inchoate, is no less unrelenting. It also tells us that it is real, that its reality ultimately offers life, that it needs to be honored, and that it may not be ignored. And, just like the reality of the world, it presents itself both as promise and threat. Sometimes it’s felt as a warm cocoon in which we sense ultimate shelter and sometimes we feel its power as a threatening judgment on our superficiality, mediocrity, and sin. Sometimes it blesses our fixation on earthly life and its pleasures and sometimes it frightens us and relativizes both our world and our lives. We can sometimes shield ourselves from it by distraction or denial; but it stays, maintaining always a powerful tension inside us: we are irremediably children of both heaven and earth; both God and the world ask for our attention.

That’s how it’s meant to be. God made us irremediably physical, fleshy, earth-oriented, with virtually every instinct inside us reaching for the things of this earth. We should not then expect that God wants us to shun this earth, deny its genuine beauty, and attempt to step out of our bodies, our natural instincts, and our physicality to fix our eyes only on the things of heaven. God did not build this world as a testing place, a place where obedience and piety are to be tested against the lure of earthly pleasure, to see if we’re worthy of heaven. This world is its own mystery with its own meaning, a God-given one. It’s not simply a stage upon which we, as humans, play out our individual dramas of salvation and then close the curtain as we leave. It’s a place for all of us, humans, animals, insects, plants, water, rocks, and soil to enjoy a home together.

But that’s the root of a great tension inside us. Unless we deny either our most powerful human instincts or our most powerful religious sensibilities, we will find ourselves forever torn between two worlds, with seemingly conflicting loyalties, caught between the lure of this world and the lure of God.

I know how true this is for my own life. I was born into this world with two incurable loves and have spent my life and ministry caught and torn between the two. I have always loved the pagan world for its honoring of this life and for its celebration of the wonders of the human body and the beauty and pleasure that our five senses bring us. With my pagan brothers and sisters, I too honor the lure of sexuality, the comfort of human community, the delight of humor and irony, and the remarkable gifts given us by the arts and the sciences. But at the same time, I have always found myself in the grip of another reality – the divine, faith, religion. Its reality too has always commanded my attention – and, more importantly, dictated the important choices in my life.

My major choices in life incarnate and radiate a great tension because they’ve tried to be true to a double primordial branding inside me, the pagan and the divine. I can’t deny the reality, lure, and goodness of either of them. It’s for this reason that I can live as a consecrated, life-long celibate, committed to religious ministry, even as I deeply love the pagan world, bless its pleasures, and bless the goodness of sex even as I renounce it. That’s also the reason why I’m chronically making an apology to God for the world’s pagan resistance, even as I’m trying to make an apologia for God to the world. I have torn loyalties.

That is as it should be. The world is meant to take our breath away, even as we genuflect before the author of that breath.